



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Summary Meeting Minutes
April 20th, 2010**

I. Call to Order & Introductions: Bill Gray, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Bill asked for all present to please stand for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged in and to remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Approval of Minutes: Rich Fales, Commissioner, motioned for the March Meeting Summary Minutes to be approved. Mike Subin, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the March Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes will be online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Update on Wheaton Veterans Park ~ Gary Stith, Deputy Director, Planning and Development, Montgomery County Department of General Services

Wheaton Veterans Park is located at the intersection of Amherst Avenue and Reddie Drive, and is the only park in downtown Wheaton. As part of the Wheaton Sector Plan process, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPP) is trying to acquire and develop more public open space. Veterans Park was included in the redevelopment plans with the permission of MNCPP, which owns the Park, with the hope that a developer would show interest in developing the park in a more central location, making it more attractive and accessible to the community. The current Veterans Park does not allow for easy use by the community given its location and the significant amount of slope. It is primarily used by veterans on certain ceremonial occasions. The County recently sent out a Request for Qualification (RFQ) to seek out developers for the redevelopment of downtown Wheaton, similar to the redevelopment of downtown Silver Spring. Several RFQ's were received for the core area of downtown between Georgia and Veirs Mill, north of Reddie Drive, and for the parking lot space north of University Boulevard. An RFQ was not received for the Veterans Park. Some individuals in the community and MNCPP are interested in working with the veterans community and the surrounding Wheaton Community to redevelop the Park and to make it more attractive for use by the community.

The Silver Spring Veterans Plaza will have a very significant art feature designed by Maryland sculptor Toby Mendez, who was previously commissioned to create a memorial of Justice Thurgood Marshall for the State of Maryland. The Plaza will be a very active space that will go beyond commemorating veterans. Mr. Stith would like to see the Wheaton Veterans Park developed into a similar space.

Jane McCarthy, Commissioner, asked what kind of memorial is currently at the Wheaton Veterans Park. Rich Fales, Commissioner, noted that there is a granite wall with engravings and a plaque. Mr. Stith will continue to keep the Commission informed of the redevelopment.

IV. Follow-Up: December, 2009 Meeting ~ Ed Chow, Secretary, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA)

Secretary Chow answered questions posed by Commissioners at the December, 2009 meeting.

- **How is the MDVA outreaching to Reserve and National Guard Units?**

MDVA is working with the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Yellow Ribbon Program, which is a DoD program that helps National Guard and Reserve units reintegrate back into the community. Maryland is one of ten states that participate in this program. The Yellow Ribbon Program includes information on current benefits and resources available to help overcome the challenges of reintegration. Veterans are required to attend Yellow Ribbon events. There are three phases to post-deployment. The first phase occurs after 30 days and includes family reintegration, awareness of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) services and programs, and pre-employment sessions. The second phase occurs after 60 days at the VA Hospital and includes a health re-assessment, health testing, counseling services, and other types of claims assessment. The third phase occurs after 90 days and includes a recap of additional information as well as grief counseling and role-playing situations similar to what the veterans will encounter upon reintegration into the community.

- **How is the MDVA partnering with Montgomery County and how are they providing services for Montgomery County veterans?**

The MDVA is working with Montgomery and other counties throughout the state. Secretary Chow has facilitated a meet-and-greet between Rich Schiffauer, who facilitates the Montgomery County Veterans Collaborative, with his Veterans Collaborative counterpart in Baltimore County. Anne Arundel County hosted a homeless event for homeless people in general. Out of the 600+ people who attended, 17 of them were veterans. The VA has an office located in Wheaton that is staffed the 2nd and 4th Thursday of every month. Veterans can make an appointment through a Veterans Service Officer. Secretary Chow will get the location of that office for the Commission. The MDVA also operates Maryland's Commitment to Veterans, which is a behavioral health outreach and referral initiative designed to serve those that have served our country. A system will be developed for the entire state. Recently there was a change in staffing for the initiative. It will now be staffed by the MDVA, the Department of Health and the Military Department. Staff has also been realigned. Previously there were two regions in the department – one for the Eastern Shore and one for the rest of the state. A third region has been created for a central area and includes Baltimore City and Baltimore, Anne Arundel, Calvert, St. Mary's, and Charles counties. A mobile force will assist that particular region.

- **Can PTSD help be given to veterans in the prison system?**

Secretary Chow met with Secretary Maynard of the Department of Public Safety & Correctional Services. Secretary Maynard will look into PTSD counseling. Secretary Chow is aware that the correctional facility in Jessup recently inquired about PTSD information from a national service organization. He is also setting up appointments with various facilities.

- **Can a question about veteran status be included on Maryland Department of Human Resources and Department of Health & Mental Hygiene intake forms?**

This is an ongoing process that Secretary Chow began in October, 2009. He started by identifying points of contact at various state agencies for veterans issues. He has met with several Secretaries that have indicated a positive response.

- **Can Maryland reprioritize monies and give them to the counties?**

Governor O'Malley and Lt. Governor Brown have fought hard and the MDVA was one of two departments that did not receive any budget cuts. The Department of Veterans Affairs was very lucky. Secretary Chow admires the legislature and the Governor during the budget process that has taken place these last few months. Staff has had to take 10 furlough days. Other staff that makes less than \$75,000 had to take 5 furlough days. They are doing their part with the money they have.

Secretary Chow opened the floor for questions.

Greg Hamilton, Active Participant, asked about the reallocation of existing resources, mainly the issue of Montgomery County not having a full-time veterans service officer (VSO). This issue was addressed three years ago when Greg attended the Governor's Task Force when Secretary Atkins was still in office. Greg also asked how the claims process has improved since Secretary Chow has taken over the MDVA. Secretary Chow said the MDVA is looking to change the current part-time VSO to a full-time VSO. As for the claims process, the Baltimore office is the lowest producing claims regional office in the country. The dividing of regions from two to three should help to some degree, although it will not solve everything.

Jane McCarthy, Commissioner, asked for an update on the Community-Based Outreach Clinic (CBOC). She is concerned that the latest discussion regarding the CBOC placed it on a military base and not in the community where it would be more accessible. Secretary Chow did not have an update, but he will look into it.

Rich Fales, Commissioner, noted that that Silver Spring Vet Center (SSVC) has moved to a temporary location. The Center is supposed to move to a permanent location in August, but he does not know the address. Roland Kauffman, Commissioner, said the Center is temporarily located at the Armory on Cherry Hill Road. Secretary Chow will look into this.

V. Chair and Vice Chair Report:

A few weeks ago Bill Gray, Chair, along with Greg Hamilton, Jack Hewitt, and Gary Stith, met with Reemberto Rodriguez, who is Director of the Silver Spring Regional Center and in charge of the Silver Spring Civic Building and Veterans Plaza. The group discussed setting up display cases and artwork in the Civic Building. The architect has designed a set-up for outside and three panels featuring generic military personnel. There will be one or two display cases inside the building for artwork and memorabilia. They may be able to use some items donated to the libraries for these cases. Bill proposed inviting Mr. Rodriguez to the May meeting. Jane McCarthy added that she attended the hard hat tour of the Silver Spring Civic Building and Veterans Plaza. There is a large conference room that will seat 350 people. She suggested using the space for a veterans ball or a similar event for Memorial Day or Veterans Day. Jackie also noted that due to downsizing, the Civic Building has an unused room that could accommodate a veterans counselor.

Greg Hamilton, Active Participant, has been involved with the development of the Civic Building and Veterans Plaza for the past 10 – 15 years. The lobby of the Civic Building was supposed to be an extension of the Plaza. The current development plans do not include a veterans presence in the building. The group reminded Mr. Rodriguez that the lobby was to house display cases. It was also discussed a few years ago that veterans groups would be able to use the meeting space for free. The flags on the Plaza do not have lighting so they will need to be taken down every night. Jane McCarthy made a motion that the Commission recommend to the County Executive that space within the Civic Building be allocated for a veterans counselor and for meeting space to be available to veterans free of charge. Mike Subin, Commissioner, noted that given the current fiscal crisis reduced fees could mean building closure if revenues are not paying expenses. He added that money received by the Commission's 501(c)(3) could be used to subsidize the rental costs incurred by veterans groups. Betsy Luecking, Staff, noted that the County is allowed to use the Strathmore four days a year free of charge. She suggested modifying the recommendation that veterans may use the Civic Building meeting space a designated number of days per year. Jackie Ogg, Commissioner, suggested including a note in the recommendation that concessions were made when this project was first started more than ten years ago. A modified motion was made to recommend to the County Executive that emphasis be put on veterans recognition and at a minimum, but

not limited to, a veterans counselor office, priority use of meeting space for veterans groups, appropriate number of flag poles and lighting at night, and displays cases. Rich Fales seconded the motion. The motion was voted on and unanimously passed.

Bill received an invite from the American Legion in Olney to speak at their monthly meeting in May. He will give a talk about the Commission. The County Executive will also be present.

The Vietnam Veterans of America held an open house in April at their new headquarters in Silver Spring. VVA State president's from 35 to 40 states attended as well as Councilmember President Nancy Floreen, Councilmembers Phil Andrews and Mike Knapp, and Delegate Karen Montgomery. Betsy Luecking, Staff, was also in attendance and noted that the VVA mentioned there may be room for a VSO at the new location. She also talked to Alan Bowser, Special Assistant to Councilmember Duchy Trachtenberg, who mentioned there is money for a pilot veterans service organization in Montgomery County.

VI. Project Updates:

Betsy Luecking, Staff, reminded Commissioners about the survey recently sent out via email that was developed by her, Commissioner Lorrie Knight Major, Jessica McNurlen, Mental Health Association, Wayne Miller, Silver Spring Vet Center, and Phil Alperson, BRAC. The survey was developed to identify unmet needs of the military community. She also noted that Jackie Ogg, Commissioner, will be joining this workgroup.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, gave an update on the 501(c)(3). Connie Latham, Special Assistant to the County Executive, is putting together an Executive Order that will allow the Commission to accept donations. Mike is still working on creating the 501(c)(3).

Rich Schiffauer, Commissioner, gave an update on the veterans recognition library displays. Unfortunately, there has not been much of a response. Bill Gray, Paula Davis, Nicky Bunting, and Lee Ann Doerflinger are all donating items for the displays. There will only be one display case located at the Rockville Memorial Library until more materials have been donated to have display cases in all of the libraries. The display will be available in early May as a month long commemoration that will tie into the Rockville Memorial Library renaming ceremony. Betsy noted that Parker Hamilton has set up a planning meeting for the official renaming of the Rockville Memorial Library. She will have more information soon. There is a tentative plan to have the official renaming on the Friday before Memorial Day.

VII. Updates / Motions for Commission Action: None.

VIII. Roundtable: None.

Adjournment: 7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, May 18th, 2010, from 6:00pm to 7:30pm at 401 Hungerford Drive, Rockville, MD in the 1st Floor Tan Conference Room.

Respectively submitted,
Carly Clem, OSC
Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison